

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 34THE ECONOMIST
16 June 1984

A new theory about flight 007

An analysis published this week makes the strongest case yet that Korean Air Lines flight 007 was involved in an intelligence-collection mission at the time it was shot down over the Soviet Union last September. Most of the early accounts, and some more detailed studies in the press during the past few weeks, have concluded that the airliner had strayed into Soviet air space by accident: the pilot had somehow set his navigational system incorrectly. Other commentators have advanced the theory that 007 was engaged in electronic intelligence, but assumed that the airliner itself would have done the collecting (whereas it is virtually certain that it did not carry equipment for this purpose).

The new assessment, published by the British magazine, *Defence Attaché*, contends that the Korean airliner was co-operating with American intelligence collection operations controlled by the space shuttle. The aircraft purposely flew over Soviet territory, the argument runs, in order to "turn on" the Russian air defence system so that the ensuing electronic emissions—radars, radios and the rest of it—could be recorded by the Americans.

Previous efforts by America to collect such information have made use of a combination of aircraft and satellite, the article says. The author makes a minute examination of the movements of both the space shuttle and the American air force's RC-135 electronic surveillance aircraft that passed near flight 007 on the night the latter was shot down. The conclusion is that all were ideally placed for a co-ordinated collection effort. The RC-135, claims the article, revealed itself to the Russians as a military aircraft, then passed close by 007 just before the airliner turned in towards Kamchatka to try to spoof the Soviet radars into believing that the aircraft approaching its air space was military, when in fact it was not. The shuttle then did the electronic monitoring.

Such near-perfect positioning, it will be argued, could hardly have happened by chance. Not necessarily so; accident and coincidence play a large part in military happenings. The magazine does not identify the article's author. But whoever he is, he appears to have had access to high-level intelligence sources in the past, and he has raised some disturbing new questions.

STAT